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ABSTRACT

Focus groups are conducted each year within the mid-Atlantic region of the United States to gather information on school restructuring to help Research for Better Schools (RBS) in its planning process. This document reports on the round of focus groups held in spring 1994 to determine the ways in which partnerships might further school restructuring efforts. Data were collected at six focus-group sessions, one held at each of the following locations: Baltimore, Maryland; Dover, Delaware; Lancaster, Pennsylvania; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Trenton, New Jersey; and Wilmington, Delaware. A total of 24 participants included representatives from state and local education and social-service agencies, institutions of higher education, professional associations, and businesses. Despite individual frustrations, participants were enthusiastic about the potential of partnerships to facilitate broad change. Factors that hindered effective partnerships included an institutional culture that encourages competition rather than cooperation and the categorical nature of state and federal funding. To ensure successful partnerships, participants recommended: (1) stay focused on clients; and (2) provide resources for staff development time, technology, equipment, and expertise. RBS was encouraged to continue to play the role of partnership advocate, sponsoring meetings and disseminating information. One table is included. (LMI)

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Partnerships as Mechanisms for Change:

The Benefits of, and Barriers to, Collaboration

submitted by

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INTRODUCTION

Focus groups are conducted each year within the Mid-Atlantic region to gather needs assessment information on school restructuring to assist Research for Better Schools (RBS) in its planning process. Focus groups enable RBS to learn about issues that school districts are grappling with as they seek to restructure their schools. As a result, RBS staff are better able to amass lessons learned and shape the laboratory's programs and services to meet the region's needs.

This document reports on the latest round of focus groups held in the spring of 1994. The central organizing theme for the FY 94 focus groups was to determine the ways in which partnerships -- coalitions of schools with businesses, institutions of higher education, social service agencies, and parent/community organizations -- might further the restructuring efforts of schools. To explore this issue, representatives from state and local education and social service agencies, institutions of higher education, professional associations, and businesses were invited to talk in-depth about the ways in which partnerships can contribute to school restructuring efforts.

The report is organized in three major sections. The first describes the methodology used to select the focus group participants, conduct the focus groups, and analyze the discussions. The second section analyzes the results of the focus group discussions and provides insights into both the needs of the schools and the ways in which partnerships address these needs and further school restructuring efforts. The final section draws conclusions about the value of partnerships as a vehicle for change, as well as the implications of this for RBS' future work plans.

METHODOLOGY

To conduct the FY 94 focus groups, a member of the Needs Assessment/Evaluation staff solicited other staff at RBS to nominate "individuals who would be 'thoughtful, informed discussants' about regional educational needs and the ways in which school partnerships might further restructuring efforts." Based on the geographic distribution of the nominations, six focus groups were scheduled, one each in Baltimore, Maryland; Dover, Delaware; Lancaster, Pennsylvania; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Trenton, New Jersey; and Wilmington, Delaware. These central locations were selected to facilitate the participation of representatives throughout the region.

Focus Group Participants

Of the 84 people invited to participate in the focus groups, 39 (46.4 percent) agreed to participate. Of those, only 24 actually attended the focus group scheduled in their area (28.6 percent of those invited and 61.5 percent of those who had accepted the invitation and thus were expected by RBS to attend.) The severe winter was offered as a general explanation for the low attendance, as individuals' calendars constantly were rearranged. (The weather-related closing of RBS also forced the rescheduling of one of the focus groups.)

Despite the low turnout, a representative cross-section of different constituent groups was achieved (see Table 1). For example, participants included teachers, principals, school district superintendents, and state department administrators (i.e., from education, health and human services), a chamber of commerce representative, an RBS board member who works with partnerships, as well as program directors of school/college and school/community partnerships. A representative from one of the major foundations (who was shadowing a member of the state agency where the focus group was conducted) observed the session, but was not included in the tally. All participants had some experience with partnerships and were able to speak to the needs of schools as they attempt to restructure.

Table 1

Focus Group Participants (Invited)

Institutional Affiliation	Number	Percent
Higher Education	6	25.0
School District	5	20.8
School Building	3	12.5
State Education Agency	3	12.5
Social Services	3	12.5
Business	2	8.3
Community Non-Profit	1	4.2
Educational Non-Profit	1	4.2
Total	24	100.0

Conduct of Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted in conference rooms provided by RBS or one of the participants (i.e., colleges and state agencies). All sessions began with introductions and a review of the purpose of the groups, as well as RBS' definition of restructuring (i.e., "to improve results for all children") to help ground the discussion. Each session was taped, with all participants promised confidentiality of individual response.

The sessions averaged 90 minutes in length and were moderated by a member of RBS' Needs Assessment/Evaluation unit who posed the following three questions to the group but otherwise remained outside the discussion.

- In what ways can (have) partnerships further(ed) school restructuring efforts?
- What changes need to occur (support given/barriers overcome) in order for partnerships to be effective mechanisms in school restructuring?
- What can organizations like RBS do to facilitate change through the partnership process?

Participants were given the three questions at the start of the session to give them a sense of the overall direction to be taken during the discussion. Participants were then asked to respond to each question in turn.

Analysis of Focus Group Discussions

To facilitate the analysis, transcripts were made of all six focus group sessions. The transcripts ranged in length from 15-30 pages with a median of 22 pages. Each transcript was read several times to identify and code the major themes that emerged for each question, within and across the six groups. Themes that emerged across most or all of the groups for each question were retained. In addition, the themes for the first two questions were combined upon discovering that they were often mirror images of each other. Appropriate quotations were highlighted for inclusion in the report, and were sometimes edited to make the text more readable.

RESULTS

This section of the report summarizes the discussions of the six focus groups. Their discussions centered on two themes. The first highlighted the value of effective partnerships as a mechanism for change, and factors that supported or hindered effective partnerships. The second theme focused on roles that RBS and other organizations can play to facilitate change through the partnership process.

Before turning to these major themes, a brief discussion is warranted regarding the concept of partnerships as described by the participants. Their responses to the three questions were drawn in large part from their own experiences with business, social service, parent/community, and college/university partnerships. More specifically, a sample of these partnerships follows, as described by participants:

> My organization is one of nine lead teacher regional centers established by the state department of education and we are in a partnership between the School District of Philadelphia and the School of Education at West Chester University, and we originally became involved in that partnership to assist the school district in its changes to site-based management and shared decisionmaking.
>
> Family Connections brings parents into the learning process through networking and collaboration between parents, teachers and school district officials.
>
> We're an organization partnering with both the school district and the University of Pennsylvania using schools as community centers, with after-school, evening and weekend programs; we also have a construction tech program, working with a community development charter at West Philadelphia High School where the young people who are in the charter are doing community service as well as learning a skill.
>
> The School-Based Youth Services Program is a program at the middle and high schools sponsored by the state department of human services and it's the one-stop-shopping concept available to adolescents and their parents and guardians.
>
> The nature of a county technical school district involves a lot of partnerships with businesses; we have advisory boards for all technical areas, so that's about 250 business people who work with our 40 programs. We also are implementing a new apprenticeship program which has several partners who are buying into youngsters for a four-year period of time, grades 11 through 14.

> The Commonwealth Partnership is a consortium of 12 independent colleges and universities which runs collaborative discipline-based programs for teachers that draw on college-level and pre-college faculty for the purpose of improving student achievement in particular disciplines. Our most recent project involves teams of teachers from the area districts in a multi-year program in the hope that by joining the teams with the college faculty at a particular site, the teachers -- elementary, middle and senior high school -- may be able to use the resources on site to help them develop curriculum materials.
>
> The University of Delaware is involved with a teacher enhancement partnership in which we are working with three different school districts, focusing in on and supporting middle school math teachers change their instructional practices and also in curriculum, to model the NCTM standards in their classrooms.
>
> The state chamber of commerce puts on a very large, statewide educational program called Superstars in Education, a major partnership between education and business in that we recognize outstanding programs statewide in both public, private, parochial, post-secondary, and lay programs that impact education, children at risk. This is our fifth year and we've honored about 90 programs, raising in excess of $350,000 to award to a variety of educational institutions. It is done with volunteers throughout the state -- educators, legislators, business people, human resource people out of major corporations who form a panel and select the winners.

As the above quotations illustrate, the partnerships described by participants varied considerably in terms of focus, players, and point/breadth of impact. Thus, while some emphasized the staff development of teachers (e.g., pre-service and in-service, curriculum development and whole school change), others honed in on the social service needs and academic supports necessary for students, their families and community. Similarly, some partnerships were designed to serve a relatively small number of teachers or schools while others sought to impact the system more broadly. Whatever their focus, all participants saw the importance of schools joining forces with those on the outside for both the financial resources and the non-financial support that such partnerships invariably offer. The extent to which these partnerships are in fact effective mechanisms of school change is discussed below.

Effective Partnerships as Mechanisms of Change

Participants were able to talk at length about the ways partnerships had and could provide an impetus for school restructuring. Two major contributions that partnerships could make

emerged from their discussions: a broader perspective toward school change and the addition of resources available to the schools. Each of these is discussed below.

Broader Perspective

The discussion from one focus group to the next echoed the importance of the broader perspective that partnerships with businesses, universities, social service agencies and parents bring to the schools. Such a perspective often forces schools to take a broader view of school change and the process required to effect these changes. Instead of tinkering with pieces of the process, schools are realizing that more sweeping changes are needed in both thinking and action to achieve the results for all students. For example, social services agencies emphasized the need to focus on the whole child, beginning from a healthy start in the womb and encompassing his or her family/community.

> I see the partnership as a critical aspect to children performing better and being more successful in schools. If we take as a set of outcomes that children will be at school more regularly, children will perform better, they'll be more successful in their interpersonal relationships, they'll end up graduating and going on to higher education or a stable work environment, there are certain preconditions that must exist for those children at any point in their school career, and those preconditions have to do with good nutrition, secure and stable sense of family, whatever their family is, certain health issues, like good eye exams, being well-nutritioned, good medical care, a quiet place for them to do their work, entering school with a set of values that supports the values that they will be experiencing in the school system.

Echoing Newmann (1994) who reminds educators of the African proverb, "It takes a whole village to raise a child," the role of the partnership is to recognize that, while critical to a child's success, these preconditions cannot be addressed by the school alone.

> Until recently, there was this assumption that children come to school ready to learn, and then the school steps in and educates the child, and that it was somebody else's responsibility to see that these preconditions were in place. It's clear, from our experience, that letting that exist as a dichotomy was ineffective, that children weren't ready to learn, the preconditions for learning weren't there. So this notion of partnership begins to create a system that looks at a child and their family holistically, says, what does a child and their family need to meet those preconditions? The schools themselves cannot be responsible for that, they have neither the resources nor the expertise, but a department of social services, or a community mental health center, or a parks and recreation also can't do it alone. There needs to be a concerted effort made, pooling of resources, a joint setting of priorities amongst all the stakeholders, to put together a

> comprehensive community agenda dedicated towards achieving outcomes. So for me, that partnership is really essential in creating the capacity in the community for those pre-conditions to be met.

The importance of addressing both the academic and social service needs of children was heard frequently throughout the focus group discussions, from both the education and social service camps. University personnel who work with teachers to implement new curriculum or instructional strategies also talked of the teachers' frustration as they attempted to teach students who were wrestling with non-education, non-school issues.

> There's so many other things that are going on in the kids' lives that are not related to the mathematics class at all that just affect how they can function in the classroom.

Business can provide yet another perspective, one which emphasizes results. Many bring to the table a history of changing the way they conduct business in order to maximize their results. Learning about such experiences, albeit in a different environment, can provide schools with evidence that change indeed is possible, along with the mechanisms for instituting change while maintaining their focus on student results.

> Business is built on results, and too much time, over the years, and even still today, there's too much focus in the school on process, and you get an A from the teacher if you follow certain processes, meet certain classes, [learn] certain things, rather than looking at the students as customers and seeing whether the students received what they needed and can do what they are supposed to do at the end. Business is doing that all the time, that's their way of life and so they can make a contribution to a school system, in a partnership, by providing that kind of thinking.

Two examples may further illustrate this point. Confronted by statistics that only about half of women giving birth at age 17 have completed their high school education by their twenties (Kenney, 1987), schools hear that they must lower the barriers to teenage mothers attending school by providing both academic and social supports. Similarly, it is not enough for a school to implement a new and improved mathematics curriculum if it bears no relevance to the students' perception of what he or she will need in "the real world" of business or other potential careers beyond high school.

Other lessons to be learned from business include negotiating with unions by building a common understanding of a common cause, and the legitimacy of ongoing staff development at the corporation's expense, on company time.

> Business went through the same cycle and they have finally come to realize that training is not an expense of doing business, it's an investment in growth.

Thus partnerships with social service agencies or businesses challenge a limited vision of change, and provide the mechanisms to institute such change.

Participants also talked at length about the barriers to a broader perspective that exist, both in individuals' mind sets, as well as the institutional cultures in which they work. These institutional cultures are built on competition, rather than cooperation, between other agencies. Participants traced the origins of the competitive institutional culture to its roots and recognized that change in this area is no easy task:

> Maybe it dates back to the way American Industrialism evolved where we had separateness between educational institutions, corporate entities, and governmental entities, and cooperation, teaming, total quality management kinds of concepts, I don't think they were there. The culture of the country is one of individuals and competition and it's not about cooperation and learning how to do that.

> If you look at the institutions, the agencies themselves, the budgeting process, the legislative process, all of those processes in government, not in business, but the governmental processes, they all support this singularity and this individualism and a competitiveness for limited resources so you have, not just a person who may be an obstacle, who doesn't see this greater vision as being of value, but you have a history of institutional behavior, institutional culture which supports it. So even if you can have a break through to the person, and they go aha, they're sitting in an institution that has every obstacle in their way.

Institutional cultures that generate turf issues help create barriers to developing both a broad perspective on educational change and effective partnerships that can support that change. For example, participants talked about experiences with administrators from institutions, built on competition, who resisted the new cooperation required of partners. As one county superintendent noted:

> One of the other aspects of partnerships that seems to become very apparent is the turf issues and it's having people involved who are willing to give up authority and for them to come to an understanding that to a

> large degree, the more they give up, the more they get, and that seems to be a paradox, but it really isn't and our principals are learning that.

Such cooperation between institutions frequently implies the sharing of scarce resources. When resources are shared, fewer numbers of staff may be needed to oversee their use. This, in turn, may result in a reduction of the work force, as was the case in the loss of middle management positions in business.

> We're not foolish people in education, or in public service in general. We've seen what's happened in business with middle-managers, white collar people being laid off just right and left, and so, with restructuring and this new way of doing things [i.e., cooperation between agencies], will one of the side effects be that we will need fewer middle-managers and they'll be out on the street along with their fellow workers from the private sector?

Cooperation between institutions also is difficult when potential partners are compensated differently. Thus, participants talked about the disparity between the salaries of education and those of social service professionals and how that inequity must be eliminated if professionals from different public institutions are going to work together.

Effective partnerships are those which have been able to overcome their individual institutional cultures:

> There's a different culture in terms of the nature of the interaction among people. It tends to be less hierarchical, more collegial, more consensual in decision making, more social in its aspect, less driven by titles and more by the knowledge that people bring to the situation and so I think that aids in communication and problem solving when the person, the head of something is not looked to for the answer, but there's a group process in decision making. I think that's an important thing partnerships can bring to the restructuring process.

The experiences of successful partnerships with business may provide important lessons on how to overcome individual institutional cultures.

> People do have mind sets about what is social work, what is public health, what is education, and that hinders our restructuring efforts in the schools. We are beginning to work more cooperatively with business. That's really where I think education has done a lot better than our relationships with public agencies and we need to benefit from thinking about those business partnerships. How did they come to be formed, and then translate that learning into how we work with other public agencies.

Additional Resources

Over half of the respondents from all six focus groups described the valuable resources gained by schools through their partnerships. The addition of money, personnel, expertise, materials, technology and equipment was seen as crucial to the restructuring work of schools struggling with insufficient resources to do education the old way, let alone plan and implement new curricula and instructional strategies. As one university partner working with elementary school teachers on a major revision of the mathematics curriculum noted:

> When I had the money, I put in for substitutes and we met once a month for dialogues and for in-services and that has paid off. It's just amazing. That's where the whole curriculum revision came from. And the teachers continually praise it. Most districts cannot even afford to pay substitutes when people are ill, and then on top of all that, to do any kind of restructuring. [Time] is important.

Thus one type of resource (money) is used to buy another type of resource (time), and according to Murphy (1991), time for teachers to learn their new roles and responsibilities is a crucial factor in school restructuring. Quoting Carnoy & MacDonell (1990, p.57), he admonishes schools to recognize that "voluntary reprofessionalization has its limits" and "that reform cannot simply be added to the already heavy load carried by school personnel, especially teachers" (Murphy, 1991, p.90). This opinion was echoed by many focus group participants, and was expressed by a university partner as follows:

> The teachers just have too many responsibilities. There's not enough time at least with teachers to be able to have the chance to establish the communication that they need to be able to investigate other new emerging technologies or new sorts of problems. If we establish performance-based outcomes, that's going to radically change the curriculum, assessment, everything. Teachers don't have the time to learn that, I mean, they just feel overwhelmed and they don't even know where to start.

In addition to freeing up time for teachers to learn new teaching strategies and write new curriculum, money also provided the freedom (or protection) to allow state-level reformers to take risks:

> [The foundation money] let us take some risks, let us learn where we haven't done well, and where we have done well and to reconfigure and to restructure, but that protection is, I think, a critical aspect of the restructuring process.

The luxury of taking risks and learning from both successes and mistakes is rare in a political environment that expects results yesterday. The need for state administrators and politicians to be patient and allow sufficient time for outcomes to emerge was heard frequently throughout the discussions.

Participants talked about the impacts of "soft funding" on partnerships. Without a full-time manager, most partnerships do not run smoothly (Grobe, 1992), and many are unable to recruit and retain effective managers because of their precarious soft funding. The way money has historically been allocated to categorical programs also can constrain the kind of creative, broad approach to school restructuring discussed above. Raising fears about the ability of a small, effective community-based model program to continue over time in the absence of its current funding, one focus group participant captured the concerns around both of these issues.

> The question is the money to sustain that, because the problem with partnerships is that they are usually grant money and soft money for a couple of years; by nature it's cross-categorical. But most of your everyday money, year after year, operating wise, comes from categorical programs which, by definition, does not allow partnerships, so part of the challenge is to reorganize the funding streams from state and federal sources to support partnerships that can broaden the kind of work that they do and to impact the whole city.

Partnerships also tend to be ineffective where either a vision for the restructured school is absent, or the partnership is not linked to the school's broader vision. The traditional adopt-a-school partnership often functions as such a model, providing incidental resources (e.g., attendance incentives) that may succeed in improving the school culture and raising attendance, but fail to address the broader goals of restructuring schools, i.e., improving the results for all children (Tyler & Gruber, 1987). One participant described her school/business partnership as an example of just such a model; the resources gained from the partnership were welcomed but had little impact on the overall educational experience of the students. Often such adopt-a-school partnerships, as the label implies, tend to be paternalistic and attend to the symptoms of a problem (e.g., poor attendance) rather than the causes (Rigden, 1991).

The acquisition of technology, equipment, and often the expertise to operate it was another valuable resource mentioned by several of the participants.

> The school wanted a bunch of computers; they didn't have any money and finally some company called and said they have them, and they [the school] can have them if they want to. And they have 12 kids out there, it's like the dirty dozen. They were disruptive kids and they got them in there and these kids took those computers and they rebuilt them, they put them together, they run them, they're doing all kinds of science stuff with them, collecting water samples and stuff around the streams and they put it on the computer. They are really doing some legitimate things with it.

The need for students to be engaged in relevant learning is a central goal of school restructuring efforts. The donation of the computers in the Sticks science program described above was just one example of several ways that effective partnerships were seen as furthering that goal. Others included the application of skills learned in the construction technology classroom to the rehabilitation of houses in the community, and the training of middle school students to go into the community to conduct health assessments with medical, nursing, and dental students. In the latter, the combination of resources (money and university personnel) provided middle school students with opportunities to apply the mathematics, science, and social studies curriculum to real life, authentic situations.

Partnerships thus can make, and indeed have made, a difference in the relevance of learning. The absence of such meaningful learning experiences frequently was cited as a cause for students falling through the cracks. As one social service administrator noted:

> While we have been able to control many of those outside negative influences that are in a child's life, we still do not see the learning side of things changing. So the kids tell us that it's wonderful what we do for them, but they are still bored in school, that this is not challenging to them, that they are not learning. The things that are being taught are not particularly relevant. They don't see how math or science is going to affect their own lives down the road, or what the relevance is for a career or some future thing, or how it's applied.

From business' perspective,

> Most of us begin to realize how the kids are not interested in theoretical education. They don't come in all steamed up about algebra because algebra doesn't translate into life, from their point of view, and so it's important that curriculum include what I call a translation into why this is important. The final value of this algebra is something that we want to

> explain to you, so we take an hour or several classes and bring in people from the outside, with outside resources, part of the partnership deal, to come in and talk to the kids and say, 'Now this is the way the business works, we make this kind of product and by the way, when someone is working on this product, this is the nature of the work and it includes algebra.' Now you help the kids make that translation, they get that sexy feeling, the enthusiasm from the product and the work. I think outside organizations can do a great deal to help the teachers and schools to get that stuff across.

Thus, effective partnerships are seen as ones which garner financial and experiential resources that provide schools with relevant learning opportunities for students.

This section of the report so far has captured the essence of the discussion around effective partnerships, i.e., the introduction of a broader perspective and the provision of resources through collaborative partnership activity. It also has pointed to the limitations of partnerships, where certain elements are absent. The remainder of this section highlights the suggested role for RBS to play in furthering partnerships in the service of school restructuring.

RBS' Role in the Partnership Process

When participants were asked, "What can organizations like RBS do to facilitate change through the partnership process?", the overriding response called upon RBS to play the role of advocate. By that, participants meant that RBS should act as an objective third party, facilitating forums and conferences so that individuals involved in a variety of partnerships could learn from the success and failures of others. By convening partners in this way, RBS also would help develop the broad perspective necessary for partnerships to effectively impact school restructuring. The substance and rationale for this role for RBS are discussed in greater detail below.

Convener of Players

Several of the participants thanked RBS for providing them with the opportunity to communicate with their counterparts in other partnerships. For example:

> The focus group has forced me stop and think and sometimes rethink some of the things that I have talked about and thought about over my years in education and I think we need this.

> I was thinking that this provided a protected time frame for me to get to know people I didn't know before, and listen to people with different areas of expertise and I think that's terrific.
>
> What I've been learning in this discussion is that partnerships with other agencies, with other types of organizations, social service and so forth, are absolutely fundamental.

Thus, using the focus groups as a model, participants talked about the value of bringing together partners from schools, businesses, universities, social service agencies, and the community who could share with each other strategies for building effective partnerships, and afford others the opportunities to learn from their lessons, thereby eliminating time wasted through re-inventing the wheel and preventing similar mistakes from being repeated.

> If you just did a thing on university-school partnerships and what is it that needs to happen in teacher education, what is working for you, what is not working, how do we move that along? That could be a wonderful thing, get the universities to talk to each other. Or if you took all the business partnerships and said, where does it work, where doesn't it work? I've heard lots of frustrations from some businesses in the partnership, "why didn't it work in the school?" What has to be in place in the school and have them understand that, and to not be distant, but to just keep in touch, keep it going, to know that these are going to be meeting again. Maybe it's not called a conference, maybe it's something larger than a focus group but there is this cross-pollination where you meet on a regular basis. That would be a fabulous contribution to educational reform.

Bringing together people with different perspectives and varied experiences also contributes to the broadening of what might otherwise be a somewhat narrow view of what needs to occur in restructured schools for student results to improve.

> One of the things you could do is to say: Look, we see that doing one (curriculum and instruction) without doing the other (social services) doesn't make any sense because the outcome we're going to get isn't going to be the broader outcome that we really need.

Such gatherings may help break down the barriers of institutional culture as people network and begin to build a common understanding of the complexity of educational reform and the collaboration necessary to effect change.

Advocate/Disseminator

By convening partner players for information sharing and networking, RBS also would play the role of advocate for such collaborations.

> I think RBS can call it like you see it, which helps. Some of the things we are all saying doesn't get said by people, especially on the education side. If we are really talking about systemic change, we really need to partner with the other systems in a way that is totally different than just doing a program here and there. We need to really embrace one another to bring together the stakeholders in individual communities and facilitate those types of gatherings. That's one of the big gaps we have, we really don't have anybody to facilitate those discussions, who's a neutral outsider; people on the inside are viewed as having vested interest so much.

The dissemination of research and information about effective partnerships which have forged collaborative links and produced positive results for children is recognized as another valuable role for RBS to play. Schorr (1988, p. 229) talked about the "high payoffs" that result "when schools make special efforts to bridge cultural and social discontinuities and enlist parents as allies in teaching their children." To this end, RBS played a major role in introducing a successful partnership program (Family Connections) developed in another regional laboratory (Appalachian Educational Laboratory) into the Mid-Atlantic region through the New Jersey Rural Assistance Council (RAC) which is facilitated by RBS. The program, which builds partnerships between parents and schools, has since been replicated in several rural counties in New Jersey. The importance of this resource was noted by the superintendent of the one of these counties:

> Family Connections was something that RBS brought into the county; it has to do with the little guys (pre-school children) coming into the school and connecting the family with the teacher in a partnership and that was just so overwhelmingly successful, it was incredible. I didn't recognize it but RBS recognized it and we were able to access it through them, that and several other things, so that knowing there's a place where you can go at least to find out what the programs are that have been successful in other areas. You can't re-invent the wheel.

Participants encouraged RBS to continue playing this dissemination role whenever it comes across effective partnership efforts. The Sticks science program, mentioned earlier, partnering a school district and a university, is an outgrowth of RBS' work with the Pennsylvania RAC. The Sticks program eventually may be another candidate for regional dissemination.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The participants of the six FY 94 focus groups, representing a broad range of constituent groups from around the Mid-Atlantic region, provided insights into the ways in which effective partnerships are able to further school restructuring efforts. Despite individual frustrations, all participants were enthusiastic about the potential of partnerships to bring about the kind of broad change that is needed to improve results for all students.

Broad change requires a broad perspective on school restructuring and that is what participants believe partnerships of different constituents bring to the table: a variety of new ideas and experiences that provide a different lens on the sometimes narrow, change-resistant environments that characterize many institutions. But resistance to change can be formidable, particularly when fortified by an institutional culture which favors and encourages competition, rather than cooperation, between institutions for resources. Effective partnerships are those that have broken through that barrier and have learned to stay focused on their clients (Schorr, 1988), instead of their turf.

Additional resources play a major role in effective partnerships, allowing schools to buy much needed staff development time for teachers. Similarly, the acquisition of technology, equipment, and the expertise to operate it represents another major benefit of partnerships, helping to make classroom learning relevant to students' lives. Unfortunately, partnerships are often funded by soft money which threatens the continuity of the program itself. And the categorical nature of state and federal funding invariably limits the kind of creative collaborative partnership efforts necessary to address the complex nature of school restructuring.

Thus, participants were able to point to the limitations of partnerships often inherent in the institutional cultures in which they are forced to operate, and offer suggestions regarding a supportive role that RBS can play to facilitate change through the partnership process. Sponsoring conferences or forums which bring together partnership players to learn from each other, and supporting the development of a broad perspective which addresses both the academic

and social service needs of students and their families were advocated strongly by all focus groups.

RBS was encouraged to support school restructuring through partnerships in a number of different ways. First, the partnership activities developed through its RACs were cited as experiences upon which RBS should build in its support of partnerships. Similarly, the dissemination of information about proven partnership programs was seen as a valuable activity to be continued and expanded. Finally, by RBS sponsoring/facilitating regular meetings, representatives of different partnerships can participate in an ongoing dialogue, to further the cause of school restructuring.

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